

Emily Adcock, MS – 2022

Washington Week Online was indubitably one of the most transformational experiences of my life. Perhaps this praise sounds disingenuous or derivative, but it is the absolute truth. I am sure my fellow delegates have echoed this plaudit as well, but I truly believe our ubiquitous acclaim of this program emphasizes its impact and importance.

I came into this program feeling both honored and intimidated out of my mind. I looked at my peers, who were all uniquely accomplished, and felt my share of imposter syndrome. I looked toward the speaker list and felt wonder at the impossibility that a young woman from Mississippi could hear directly from names she had heard about on the news. Despite my initial apprehension to meeting everyone, I was greeted with open arms. My fellow delegates were some of the wittiest and thoughtful people I have had the honor to meet. Even the speakers were warm and complimentary to my delegates.

The days were long; I'll be transparent. However, I have never been more engaged. Controversial discourse was welcomed, but dialogue was directed through a lens of mutual respect. In that vein, a major theme of Washington Week was political polarization and how to mitigate its effects. Senators like Chris Coon and Susan Collins told us how they approach this issue and how to find compromise during intense debates. Washington Week also occurred during some of the early days of the emerging Russian-Ukrainian conflict. So, hearing from leaders like United Nations Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield and General Mark Milley was especially impactful. My confidence in diplomacy, even during political turmoil, was renewed. We were called to question how media influences our own perspective on world events. Dr. Betty Koed and NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, Carmen Romero, spoke with us about historical and political narratives are constantly shifting. Deputy White House National Climate Advisor Ali Zaidi encouraged all of us to find reciprocity in the American dream. A major motif of all the speakers was on how to deliver a more equitable future for future for every American.

Honestly, each speaker was so impactful and informed on their issue that I found myself considering new career paths simply because of the passion I saw behind their words. The speakers' advice to this delegation of U.S. Senate Youth was constantly rewarding. We were encouraged by Secretary Pete Buttigieg to approach life with conviction and humility. Michael Kikukawa, a White House press assistant, suggested to commit to even the most menial of tasks if it advances a cause. My military mentor, Captain Rachel Dryhurst, taught us to give grace to ourselves and others. Hearing from leaders on a national stage humanized public service for me in a way I thought to be impossible.

I would encourage anyone to apply for this program. The time I spent here taught me to shift my mindset for the better. I learned that there are many different paths to making an impact if one is commits to it. Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta gave us the following advice that I found incredibly memorable: "Hope is a muscle. Hope is a discipline." When I logged of my final Zoom for this program, I did feel immense hope in my future, my fellow delegates' future, and our nation's future. I am so grateful to have this incredible opportunity. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity that I will treasure always.